

Ekphrastic Poetry Lesson Plan

Materials:

Additional paintings can be found on the Google Arts and Culture site by searching for specific genres, or by virtually visiting the google museum partners which can be found here:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/partner>

Paintings used in this lesson:

The Sleeping Gypsy by Henry Rousseau 1897 from the MOMA, NYC

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-sleeping-gypsy-henri-rousseau/4gGIGzr3QW9xkw>

Still Life with Three Puppies by Paul Gauguin 1888 from the MOMA, NYC

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/still-life-with-three-puppies/MQHj7hahHL85Vg>

The Scream by Edvard Munch 1910 from The Munch Museum, Oslo

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-scream-edvard-munch/eQFdRTFKDtVQ1A>

Poems and their associated paintings used in this lesson can be found here:

'Starry Night' by Anne Sexton

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42565/the-starry-night>

'Not My Best Side' by U.A Fanthorpe:

<http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/uccello.html>

'Nighthawks' by Anne Carson

<http://www.paintersandpoets.com/2016/10/anne-carson-ear-to-canvas.html>

Video Tutorial:

- step by step walk through of the lesson plans
- ideas for how to expand or contract lessons to fit your schedule
- additional digital tools you may use to enhance speaking or writing skills

Lesson One Overview:

Lesson aim: Students feel comfortable using a wide variety of adjectives and descriptive language to discuss visual art.

Skills Focus: Speaking Skills, Vocabulary in Context (feelings/emotions, adjectives), Critical Thinking Skills (specifically observation, analysis and interpretation)

In the first lesson, look at a few paintings together and ask the students to talk about the following questions:

What is the painting of? What do you see? Are there people, animals or special objects? What are they doing?

Why do you think the painter painted this? How do you think the painter felt when he was painting? Was he happy, sad, anxious, envious, angry...? What was he thinking? Was he hungry, thirsty, hot or cold? Imagine yourself as the painter.

Imagine you are in the painting. Maybe you are one of the people or things in the painting. What do you see? What can you smell? How does it make you feel?

Possible paintings to look at and discuss as a class:

The Sleeping Gypsy by Henry Rousseau 1897 from the MOMA, NYC

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-sleeping-gypsy-henri-rousseau/4gGIGzr3QW9xkw>

Still Life with Three Puppies by Paul Gauguin 1888 from the MOMA, NYC

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/still-life-with-three-puppies/MQHj7hahHL85Vg>

The Scream by Edvard Munch 1910 from The Munch Museum, Oslo

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-scream-edvard-munch/eQFdRTFKDtVQ1A>

Lesson One Detailed Instructions:

Step 1) Open the class (5 minutes): Ask the class *“Have you ever been to a museum? What do they have there? Do you have any art in your home, maybe on your walls? Why do you think your parents put that art there? Does it make you happy?”*

Today we are going to start a unit about Poetry. More specifically, ekphrastic poetry. Ekphrastic poems are poems written about works of art. The word ekphrasis sounds kind of weird doesn't it? That's because it is a concept which comes from ancient Greece. Ekphrasis is a way for people to get to the essence of a piece of art, to explore its deeper meaning.

Step 2) Look at paintings and ask questions (15 minutes):

[Give students more ideas for the first example so they have a better idea of what information you are trying to elicit. Encourage students to share more of their own ideas for the second (and third if needed) example. Make sure they know there are no wrong answers here.]

*Let's start by looking at some paintings and asking ourselves some questions to try and get to a deeper level. We'll start by looking at *The Sleeping Gypsy* by Henry Rousseau.*

Q1) What is the painting of? What do you see? Are there people, animals or special objects? What are they doing?

Possible Answers: I see a woman sleeping, she has dark skin and pink hair. She's holding a long stick and has an instrument (mandolin) and a jug near her. It might have water inside it. There is a lion, he is looking at the painter, you can tell it's male because of its mane (hair). Its eye is red. You can see the moon. It looks like there's a face in the moon. They are near a river. There are mountains in the background. It's night time. You can see some stars.

Q2) What do you feel when you look at this painting?

Possible Answers: It makes me feel... calm, anxious, happy, tired, scared...etc. It makes me want to.... sleep, go on vacation, go to the zoo, play my guitar, go hiking...etc.

Q3) Why do you think the painter painted this? How do you think the painter felt when he was painting? Was he happy, sad, anxious, envious, angry...? What was he thinking? Was he hungry, thirsty, hot or cold? Imagine yourself as the painter.

Possible Answers: Maybe he painted it because he was tired. Maybe he was visiting a river and wanted to paint the mountains, but then he saw someone taking a nap and thought it would be funny to paint her with a lion. Maybe he was angry and wanted a lion to eat them. Maybe he saw a beautiful woman and wanted to keep her in his mind forever. Maybe he was on a camping trip and didn't have a camera so he painted a picture instead.

Q4) Imagine you are in the painting. Maybe you are one of the people or things in the painting. What do you see? What can you smell? How does being there make you feel?

Possible Answers: I can feel the breeze coming from the mountains and the water. The air smells fresh like the mountains. The air feels hot. It smells like a dirty lion. I see a vast landscape with nothing around but the woman and lion who are next to me. I feel scared that I'm going to get eaten. I feel sleepy because it's night but I can't sleep because the lion is there.

[Make sure to call on students by name to get them to share their ideas, or let them write their ideas on the screen. Hide the names of annotators in zoom that students do not feel pressured or embarrassed to share their ideas. The goal is to spark the students' imaginations, and get them to use vocabulary in context, not to test their ability to analyze art. If they are sharing ideas, the exercise is successful.]

Steps 3 & 4) Repeat questions from Step 2) for one or two more paintings (listed in the overview), until you think students are comfortable with the exercise.

5) Student Task - Put students into breakout rooms, have one student from each group take notes about their discussion on a Google Doc. After 10 or 15 minutes they should report back to the rest of the class about the paintings they chose and what they thought. *If you think they will take too long to choose their paintings, you may choose a few options for them. (Post the Handout in the Google Classroom as an Assignment. Also cut and paste the instructions and questions below into the chat in Zoom):

Visit a virtual museum and choose a painting you like. You can find the museums at the Google Arts and Culture website <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner>

Make a note of the name of the painting and the painter, as well as the url where you found it.

Think about the following questions:

Q1) What is the painting of? What do you see? Are there people, animals or special objects? What are they doing?

Q2) What do you feel when you look at this painting?

Q3) Imagine yourself as the painter. Why do you think the painter painted this? How do you think the painter felt when he/she was painting? Was he/she happy, sad, anxious, envious, angry...? What was he/she thinking?

Q4) Imagine you are in the painting. Maybe you are one of the people or things in the painting. What do you see? What can you smell? How does being there make you feel?

Step 5: After 10 or 15 minutes they should report back to the rest of the class about the paintings they chose and what they thought about it.

While each group shows us the painting they chose and tells us what they thought about it, think about whether you feel the same way when you see the painting, and think of one question you can ask them. For example, “Why does the painting make you scared?”, or “Why do you think there’s a lion there?”. I will call on you randomly so make sure you are paying attention.

Alright group one, can you share your screen and show us which painting you chose? Tell us what you thought about it. (Student speaks) Great insight! Seo Jin (Call on a student) do you feel the same way when you look at this painting? Do you have any questions for group one?

(Repeat for every group, call on two or three students as time permits. You may need to continue to the next class to cover all of the groups.)

Lesson Two Overview:

Lesson aim: Students feel comfortable using a wide variety of adjectives and descriptive language to discuss visual art.

Skills Focus: Speaking Skills, Vocabulary in Context (feelings/emotions, adjectives), Critical Thinking Skills (specifically observation, analysis and interpretation)

Materials:

Painting One - ‘Starry Night’

Painting by Vincent Van Gogh:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-starry-night-vincent-van-gogh/bgEuwDxeI93-Pg>

Poem Starry Night by Anne Sexton

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42565/the-starry-night>

Painting Two - 'Saint George and the Dragon' by Paolo Uccello



Source: <https://www.thoughtco.com/ekphrastic-poetry-definition-examples-4174699#:~:text=Ekphrastic%20poetry%20explores%20art,.a%20type%20of%20ekphrastic%20writing.>

Poem for painting two: 'Not My Best Side' by U.A Fanthorpe:
<http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/uccello.html>

Painting Three - 'Nighthawks' by Edward Hopper

https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/nighthawks-edward-hopper-american-1882-1967/6AEKkO_F-9wicw

Poem - Nighthawks by Anne Carson

I wanted to run away with you tonight
but you are a difficult woman
the rules of you—
Past and future circle round us

now we know more now less
in the institute of shadows.

On the street black as widows
with nothing to confess
our distances found us
the rules of you—
so difficult a woman
I wanted to run away with you tonight.

*Yet I say boldly that I know that if nothing passed away, time past were not.
And if nothing were coming, time future were not.
And if nothing were, time present were not.*

(Augustine, *Confessions XI*)

From: <http://www.paintersandpoets.com/2016/10/anne-carson-ear-to-canvas.html>

In the second lesson, continue to introduce the concept of Ekphrastic Poetry to the students. First, share the definition. Then present the artwork each poem is based on and have students discuss it (using the questions from lesson 1) before presenting the associated poem. Discuss the poem - what it means as well as its structure.

Lesson Two Detailed Instructions:

Step 1) Open the class (5 minutes): A simple definition of ekphrastic poetry is that it is poetry about a work of visual art. The writer of the poem uses the art as inspiration to write a poem that expresses “the essence” of the painting, or a deeper meaning about the artwork. Let’s take a look at some paintings and the poems people wrote about them, and see if we can figure out the relationships between the poems and the paintings.

Step 2) Look at paintings and ask questions then analyze related poem (repeat this step for painting 2. If students seem comfortable have them analyze paintings 3 on their own in groups, then report back to the class):

Let’s start with the painting, ‘Starry Night’.

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-starry-night-vincent-van-gogh/bgEuwDxeI93-Pg>

Q1) What is the painting of? What do you see? Are there people, animals or special objects? What are they doing?

Q2) What do you feel when you look at this painting?

Q3) *Imagine yourself as the painter. Why do you think the painter painted this? How do you think the painter felt when he/she was painting? Was he/she happy, sad, anxious, envious, angry...? What was he/she thinking?*

Q4) *Imagine you are in the painting. Maybe you are one of the people or things in the painting. What do you see? What can you smell? How does being there make you feel?*

Read the poem *Starry Night* by Anne Sexton

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42565/the-starry-night>



free image from Pixabay.com

'Starry Night' by Vincent Van Gogh

What is the relationship between the poem and the painting? Is she describing the painting itself, the painter, or what it is like to be in that world?

Painting Two



Paolo Uccello: Saint George and the Dragon, Oil on Canvas, c. 1470. Paolo Uccello via Getty Images

Read the poem, 'Not My Best Side' by U.A Fanthorpe:

<http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/uccello.html>

What is the relationship between the poem and the painting? Is she describing the painting itself, the painter, or what it is like to be in that world? Is she speaking from the perspective of someone in the painting?

Painting 3 - 'Nighthawks' by Edward Hopper

https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/nighthawks-edward-hopper-american-1882-1967/6AEKkO_F-9wicw



Edward Hopper: Nighthawks, Oil on Canvas, 1942. Institute of Chicago.

Nighthawks by Anne Carson

I wanted to run away with you tonight
but you are a difficult woman
the rules of you—
Past and future circle round us
 now we know more now less
 in the institute of shadows.

 On the street black as widows
 with nothing to confess
our distances found us
the rules of you—
so difficult a woman
I wanted to run away with you tonight.

*Yet I say boldly that I know that if nothing passed away, time past were not.
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And if nothing were, time present were not.*

(Augustine, *Confessions XI*)

From: <http://www.paintersandpoets.com/2016/10/anne-carson-ear-to-canvas.html>

What is the relationship between the poem and the painting? Is she describing the painting itself, the painter, or what it is like to be in that world? Is she speaking from the perspective of someone in the painting?

Lessons Three to Five Overview:

In the third, fourth and fifth lessons, choose a painting and write a poem about it as a class (third class period for the example poem, fourth lesson students work on their own, fifth lesson students present and give feedback). Start by describing the painting- the colors, the style, what is happening, and who or what is in it. Then brainstorm all of the emotions and thoughts that first come up when students look at the painting. After that, explore the people in the painting and talk about what they may be feeling or thinking. Take the words and phrases from your brainstorm and put them together in a poetic way, adding or subtracting words as you and the class see fit.

I suggest using *The Scream* for the example poem as students find it interesting and easy to relate to. Also, you have already discussed it in the first lesson, so the brainstorming session may be a bit easier. Find the painting here:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-scream-edvard-munch/eQFdRTFKDtVQ1A>

Student Task (Put students into pairs or small groups in breakout rooms and allow them to choose a painting of their own to write a poem about. Students will have the rest of the third lesson to choose a painting and brainstorm. The fourth lesson will be used to write their poems (make sure to visit them in their breakout rooms and help them). In the fifth lesson, they will present their poems to the class.

Choose a painting and write a poem about it as a group. You can find paintings in the museums linked here:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/partner>

In order to write a poem, you will need ideas! Take these steps to get some ideas for your poem:

- 1) Describe the painting- the colors, the style, what is happening, and who or what is in it.
- 2) Brainstorm all of the emotions and thoughts that first come up when you look at the painting.
- 3) After that, explore the people in the painting and talk about what they may be feeling or thinking.

Now, take the words and phrases from your brainstorm and put them together in a poetic way, adding or subtracting words to make it sound more poetic. BE CREATIVE! Use your imagination. This is poetry, have fun with it!

In the fifth lesson students will present their paintings and poems to the class by sharing their screens and reciting their poetry out loud. Before the presentations begin tell the other students that they must listen for one way the poem relates to the painting and one thing they liked about them poem or the way their peer recited it.